

Language Learning in Higher Education: Are Faculty Members Digitally Literate?

by

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Abstract

This theoretical study is aimed to reveal what digital literacy is, to explain how digital literacy is applied in language learning in higher education and to reveal the consequences for faculty member in higher education for conquering digital literacy. The underlying study in this theoretical paper is the core components of digital literacy. It also discusses the literacy in higher education as well as the Digital literacy in EFL Context, which create the consequences of the Faculty members. In the discussion part, it figures out that not all Faculty member are digital literate, therefore it is suggested give professional development to the Faculty Member which later on can promote digital literacy to their students.

Keywords: higher education, Faculty Member, digital literacy, professional development

Introduction

It can be denied that the rapid development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in life have great impacts in all sectors of life including education sector. In this sector, ICT has its own role to create different stylishness of teaching and learning for the new generation (Sangrà & González-Sanmamed, 2010) and (Aristovnik, 2012). Previously, teaching and learning activities mostly were carried out in the classroom and focused on teacher and students communication. However, since its invention, ICT has the pertinent impact for teaching and learning process as it facilitates teaching and learning process, creates conducive learning environment, and helps learners develop creative thinking and self-confidence (Nwigbo & Madhu, 2016). The integration of ICT into education has become a process whose implications go far beyond the technological tools nurturing the educational environment. (Hernandez, 2017)

Since all teaching and learning processes are meant to promote literacy to the learners, which means in the very simple way, students are able to read and write, the use of ICT in the process becomes very crucial in this era. In a more prominent meaning, literacy means a process of using reading, writing and oral language to construct meaning through interaction with multimodal text in the context. (Frankel, et al, 2016). In the context of using ICT in the process of teaching learning, literacy means that the ability to apply technology to propose interaction and communication in a wider context. Previous research studies on the use of ICT in developing literacy in teaching-learning processes have been carried out (Ziden, et all. 2011), (Hernandez, 2017)

Based on ICT in language learning for promoting literacy, this paper has three objectives: First is to reveal what digital literacy is. It becomes a necessity to get the idea of digital literacy especially in the higher education. Second is to see how digital literacy is applied in language learning in higher education. The last is to reveal the consequences for faculty member, which lead to the professional development

The definition of digital literacy

Since its development, digital literacy has become an umbrella concept for important skill clusters (UNESCO, 2011). Before defining what digital literacy is, it is necessary to define what ICT literacy refers since ICT literacy is the basic of digital literacy. According to UNESCO (2011), ICT literacy is a set of user skills that enable active participation in a society where services and cultural offerings are computer-supported and distributed on the internet. One important point for this literacy is the internet, which enable the users to get involved in the broad society, which is connected, to one another around the world. There is no limitation for the users to be connected to the world by mastering some specific skills of ICT.

According Gilster (in Lankshear, 2006) (no 3), digital literacy refers to the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide variety of sources when it is presented via computers and, particularly, through the medium of the Internet. Gilster adds that it has a deeper understanding of digital technology and comprises the user skills, which refers to the ability to locate, identify, retrieve, process and use digital information optimally. Son et al. (2017) state

another definition of digital literacy as the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to use the digital tools appropriately. They pointed the focus on the ability to identify access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyze and synthesize digital resources. They also emphasize on the ability to communicate with others in the context of specific life situations in order to enable constructive social action by the means of the use of technology and the internet.

Hague and Payton (2010) stated that to be digitally literate means to have access to a broad range of practices and cultural resources that enable the users to apply to digital tools. It is the ability to make and share meaning in different modes and formats; to create, collaborate and communicate effectively and to understand how and when digital technologies can best be used to support these processes (p. 2). Moreover, Ng (2012) notes that digital literacy refers to the multiplicity of literacies associated with the use of digital technologies. These technologies are division of electronic technologies that include hardware and software used by individuals for educational, social and/or entertainment purposes in schools and at home.

Points to take into account of those definitions are that digital literacy refers to the set of ability to get involve in the broad communication effectively by make use of technology and by applying digital tools. It means that a person is called a digitally literate when s/he is able to apply digital tool connected to the internet to take part in the global communication.

Components of digital literacy

According to Consensus Document of CETF ICT Digital Literacy Initiative (2008), there are some basic elements of digital literacy, which has a function in a knowledge society. There are five basic elements suggested by the documents; access, manage, integrate, evaluate and create. *Access* refers to knowing about and knowing how to collect and/or retrieve information. Therefore, based on this basic element a person is said to be literate when s/he is able to search, find and retrieve information in digital environment, which is known as a virtual, or cyber-generated environment accessed or created with one or more digital devices such as a computer, tablet, or a cellular phone. (IGI Global, 2018)

The second basic element of digital literacy is how to manage. *Manage* refers to the ability in applying an existing organizational or classification scheme. A person is categorized into literate to manage when s/he is able to conduct a simple and preliminary organization of accessed information for retrieval and future application. In this sense, a person should be able to not only retrieve but also able to use what s/he retrieve in certain needs in the future. The third one is *integrate* which refers to interpreting and representing information - summarizing, comparing, and contrasting. After s/he is able to manage the information, she has to understand how to interpret it and later to represent the information by using ICT tools to synthesize, summarize, compare, and contrast information from multiple sources.

Evaluate is the fourth element of digital literacy. This element refers to the ability of making judgments about the quality, relevance, usefulness, or efficiency of information. Since the digital environment is the open access and open sources, a user has to be literate in judging those of the currency, appropriateness, and adequacy of information and information sources for a specific purpose. The next element is *create*. To be able to communicate in digital world, a user should be able to adapt, apply, design, or invent information in ICT environments and finally to describe an event, express an opinion, or support a basic argument, viewpoint or position. The last one is *communicate* which refers to information persuasively to meet needs of various audiences through use of an appropriate medium. It indicates that a digital literate person should be able to communicate, adapt, and present information properly in its in ICT environments and for a peer audience. Moreover, Son (2015) stated the same idea that digital literacy contains five elements i.e., information search and evaluation; creation; communication; collaboration; and online safety. These five elements are also very important to evaluate the user of being digital literate.

Digital literacy in higher education

The development of digital literacies is becoming an increasingly urgent priority across the higher education sector. If universities are to bind the potential of new media for education and graduate preparation, they must view the sustainable development of digital literacies as a mainstream priority.

The priority for a university commonly is standard goals to achieve by the students. They have set the competences for their graduates. According to Lehr (2007) to be the global education, a higher education institution should set goal for the graduates to have internationalization, intercultural competence, global awareness, global literacy, and world-mindedness.

The first goal is internationalization, which refers to the internationalization of higher education institutions, which becomes a global phenomenon that comprises a large number of activities, including student mobility initiatives. These students' initiatives can be in the type of exchange programs, internships, and other study abroad programs. Not only for the students, it also for the faculty members to do research and collaborative development projects with collaborates abroad; faculty exchange programs; twinning arrangements and satellite campuses; and others. (Bond, Qian, & Huang, 2003; Ellingboe, 1998).

Intercultural competence refers to a set of consistent behaviors, attitudes, and policies displayed and applied by individuals that enable these individuals to interact effectively in cross-cultural situations (Helms, 2004 cited in Lehr 2007). Global awareness refers to the extent to which a person is acquainted of the fact that experiences and events are part of an international, global, or world society, and this understanding of himself as a member of that society. Global literacy refers to the ability to function effectively in the global community. World-mindedness is often used interchangeably with global literacy or global awareness

Having the broader goal of higher education, in many countries, educational policies for the development of digital literacy demanding higher objective. It starts to focus on the development of infrastructure which lead to the *digital pedagogy revolution* the 1980s and at the end of the 20th century, ICTs became standard in most countries not only for teaching and learning but also for assessment, management, and communication. Computers have ultimately fulfilled their promise: they became substances of innovation processes in education.

Spark (2016) suggests one importance of digital literacy in higher education in his research. Spark stated that digital information literacy (DIL)—generally defined as the ability to obtain, understand, evaluate, and use information in a variety of digital technology contexts—is a critically

important skill which is necessary for success in higher education as well as in the global networked economy. Simpson & Obdalo (2014) that the Pedagogy of Multi-literacies identified six meaning-making elements state another importance of digital literacy in higher education: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spacial and multimodal as Higher Education has embraced new technologies over recent years, multimodal forms of meaning making have started to receive recognition. This recognition has been a start that digital literacy becomes the need in higher education.

Digital literacy in EFL Context

This digital era has forced teaching and learning EFL link to the digital world. Some research studies have proved that by applying technology such as CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) in teaching EFL students can develop their confidence and competence to enter the digital world (Son, 2017) as in this era, students are exposed to the digital environment which allow them to use technology both inside and outside of the classroom.

In language teaching context, digital literacy studies reflect current thinking on digital literacies from multiple perspectives. These perspectives may offer recommendations for best practices in the classroom. Swaffar and Arens in Guikema (2014) assert that changes over the past few decades reflect an understanding of literacy as socially bounded and contextual. Since there are many changes in thinking and practice evolved over the past two decades, it now seems vital to examine policies, practices, theories, and beliefs about digital literacies in foreign language education. These changes affect the ways to use language as well as the ways to learn languages. The challenges of multiculturalism and multimodal forms of communication call for a revised definition of literacy that goes beyond textual paraphrase as an adequate measure of reading ability and measure of writing skills (Guikema & Williams, Ed. 2014). Although literacy is like a basic component of most educational activities, it is often viewed as a set of basic skills for beginning learners to master, involving not much more than being able to read, write, and “sound out” all the letters or characters of a foreign alphabet or writing system.

In higher education, textbooks, some of which seem to ignore the great potential for integrating literacy into learning modules and projects (Guikema & Williams, Ed. 2014), usually determine the foreign language curriculum. Unfortunately, the multimodal, visual, written and audio texts provided in some textbook programs are often little more than tools that teachers can use for comprehension checking. While it is certainly important for learners to understand what they read, view, and/or hear, a review of most textbook programs reveals that a linguistic perspective of literacy dominates, resulting in a scope of literacy-based activities that is essentially limited to phonetics, morphology, syntax, and semantics.

Kern's (2000) model for integrating literacy into the foreign language curriculum involves three perspectives: linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural, all of which are interdependent and deserve equal attention. While there are certainly other models for promoting digital literacy in foreign language education (Guikema, 2014) the model developed by Kern is just one example of a call for an expanded view of literacy including digital literacies.

EFL Faculty Members in higher education readiness to digital literacy

Every educator must understand that digital literacy is essential if we want our citizens to function in today's modern world, which provided a different place than it was ten years ago. Around 2007, the first smart phone was introduced which challenged to a new career as app developer. It is quite weird since they are not equipped with limited digital knowledge to be in the position. Not only that position, there many more positions numerous new careers that did not exist ten years ago and are available after the invention of the technology and the key of these new jobs is that they require people who are digitally literate. In developed countries, four out of the seven fastest growing jobs directly require technology skills and digitally literacies. Knowing this, educators, especially Faculty Member in higher education should be ready for this.

Educator have to be ready to face that rapid changing of this technology and get involved to be digitally literate. The foundation is by changing the mindsets to use them reflectively and strategically, that teaching and learning processes can be deepened. So investment in training on how to use ICT, and working towards a vision of transformation, creative thinking and innovation

becomes the focus of what needs to be done. The first steps to take in the journey towards transformation in the way we teach and learn is to understand the foundation blocks of digital literacy.

Faculty members need opportunities to negotiate learning within the context of their own practice. However, some research studies show the result that Faculty Members have taken the challenge of the digital literacy. According to Baikady and Mudhol (2013), the Faculty member who have above average computer literacy skills used web resources less frequently. The faculty members who were having below average computer skills did not access web resources frequently. It indicates that some are ready with the challenge while some others are not. Other research conducted by Maharana and Mishra (2007) found that a majority of the university faculty members had Internet knowledge. They used Search Engines most frequently for browsing and searching on the web but less used subject gateways, bibliographic databases, etc., were less used by them. On the contrary, Rafique (2014) stated that the faculty members in Pakistan were proficient in determining the existence of the needed information and organizing, analyzing, evaluating and fully understanding the retrieved information. Not all Faculty members are ready to challenge the digital literacy in higher education context.

The consequences of digital literacy for the Faculty Members

In this modern era, digital sources and materials are digitally delivered in higher education but some faculty members, unfortunately, do not use them because of their minimal uptake of technologies and general lack of understanding of the potential of digital education technologies in supporting pedagogy (Burton et al, 2015). One example is that the lecture materials remain the same from time to time although when the materials to be delivered electronically with little incorporation of ICTs to promote interactivity, it will be a great advantage not only for the faculty members but also the students.

There is a growing body of national and international evidence demonstrating the positive impact of digital technologies on measurable learning outcomes as well. A study implemented by the

British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta) reveals that the integrated use of technology enables a range of positive outcomes for young people. However, since some faculty members are not ready to challenge the digital literacy, it needs to take into account that they need to get the professional development to get ready to promote digital literacy in foreign language education for themselves and later to the students.

Professional development undertaken in isolation from teachers' daily work has rarely led to change in practice (Nguyen et al, 2006). Educators such as Faculty Members need to receive specific strategies directly relating to their immediate context. They need to see themselves as learners, evaluate their newly developing knowledge, and recognize the interaction between learning and teaching to improve their practice (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Additionally, they should aim to view teaching and classroom events from their students' perspectives. It is mainly that students nowadays are exposed to technology since they were born. It means that it cannot be denied that teaching learning strategies should be related to their era, which use all technologies in all aspects.

In the link to the basic elements of digital literacy, Faculty Members should get many types of development programs especially in being digitally literate to access, manage, integrate, evaluate and create. Therefore, Faculty Member has to be ready to access some open sources in the internet. However, since there are thousands, they should be trained in how to access the most appropriate sources to use effectively. Having the appropriate sources, they need to have the ability to manage them into the ready material for teaching. How to integrate the materials pedagogically to meet the aims of the teaching learning and the target of competency the students need to achieve. Evaluating of the digital sources is also one the Faculty members to master. Each of the component is very important for the Faculty Member to accommodate and to be ready to get involved in the digital world. Moreover, by being digitally literate, Faculty Members are ready to promote the students to be digitally literates.

Conclusion

Digital literacy with its perspectives and components may offer the recommendation for Faculty Members for best practices in the classroom. Therefore, they should be digitally literate in order to conduct the teaching learning effectively, especially in language teaching in higher education. However, it is found out that some of the Faculty Members are not literate enough to apply the digital media in teaching. Some material the used in the courses remind the same from time to time, which in some cases does not link to the digital era the students, have been exposed since they were born.

To make the Faculty Member ready to use the digital sources and to be digitally literate, professional developments on how to be digitally literate and use the open digital sources is especially needed. The need to make use of the ICT for the best practice in the classroom,

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